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Ideal Women

The Prophet once remarked that the best woman of the Jewish people was Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the best woman of his people, Khadija, the daughter of Khuwailid.

More light is thrown on the superiority of these two women by the following two statements of the Prophet:

Aisha says that the only other wife of the Prophet that she ever felt envious of was Khadija, even though she was not a contemporary of hers. "Whenever the Prophet sacrificed a goat," Aisha says, "he would tell me to send some meat to Khadija's friends. One day I got annoyed. 'Oh no, not Khadija again,' I exclaimed. 'Her love has been imbibed into my heart,' the Prophet said."

Aisha says that the Prophet would not leave home without praising Khadija. One day he mentioned Khadija and I got annoyed. 'She was just an old woman,' I said. 'God has given you better than her instead.' This angered the Prophet, who said: 'God knows he has given me no better than her. She believed when others disbelieved. She had faith in me when others denied me. She gave me financial support when others left me in the cold. And God gave me children by her, which He has not given me by my other wives.'

The special historical status that Mary and Khadija enjoy is due to the fact that they both gave themselves entirely up to God; they both attached their own will to that of the Almighty.

When the Judaic era was drawing to a close, a woman was required who would be fit to be the mother of a miraculous prophet of the nature of Jesus, on whom be peace. God had ordained that the final prophet of the Jewish people should be born without a father. For this purpose, a woman was needed whose innocence and chastity were beyond question. The virgin Mary lived up to this standard. By living a life of extraordinary chastity, she showed herself fit to be selected as the mother of Jesus.

The circumstances of the final prophet, Muhammad, on whom be peace, were such that he needed a woman who would put her life and her property entirely in his hands, and would never complain about anything. God selected Khadija for this work because of her superlative qualities. She gave up everything – her life, her property, her leisure and her comfort – for the sake of the Holy Prophet. She suffered tremendous affliction, but never complained. These qualities made her worthy in God's sight to be the companion of His final prophet.

In every day and age, women and men are needed who will devote themselves to the mission of Islam; people who are willing to involve themselves in the scheme that God seeks to implement in the world. Such people are like a small cogwheel, which revolves only according to the motion of a bigger cogwheel, in this case the will of God. This is undoubtedly a trying task; but it is also one that carries a vast reward.

To perform this task is, in the words of the Qur'an, "to help God" (Qur'an, 22:40). There can be no doubt about the excellence and superiority of those whom God deigns to make His helpers.

Man's true purpose in life

Man attains his highest distinction only when he leads a purposeful life. Such a life characterizes the most advanced stage of human development. This does not mean that by taking up just any task which is apparently significant man's life becomes truly purposeful. A really purposeful life is one in which man discovers his supreme status; a life in which his personality makes manifest its unique distinctive quality. An animal strives to obtain food; a bird flies in search of a better country when the seasons change; a wasp busies itself building up its own home from tiny particles of earth; a herd of deer takes measures to protect itself from wild beasts of prey. All of these appear to be purposeful actions. But when the phrase 'a purposeful life' is applied to man, then it does not refer to efforts of this nature. Without doubt arranging for one's food, clothes and habitation are sure of the tasks that man has to perform in this world; but this is a level of purposefulness in which men and animals, being concerned only with bare survival, are equal. Its true application in relation to man can only be one in which he appears in all his dignity. Man's life becomes purposeful only when it goes beyond common animalism and takes the form of superior humanism.

God's creations in this world fall into two categories: animate and inanimate. Obviously, animate objects enjoy a certain superiority over inanimate objects. The former can be divided into three classes: the vegetable, the animal and the human. Modern scientific research has shown that plants also possess life, in that they nourish themselves, they grow and they have feelings.

But animals and men surely represent a higher form of life. In what way does man excel animals? Many theories have been advanced in answer to this question over the ages, and great minds are still studying it. But modern biologists have come to the conclusion that it is man's capacity for conceptual thought which distinguishes him from other life-forms. Animals lack this quality, whereas man is conscious of the fact that he is thinking. He consciously forms a plan of action in his mind; in his everyday life his actions are determined by himself. Whereas this is not the case with animals. Though many of their actions appear to be like those of men, they are not the result of thought; they all stem from pure instinct. Animals are simply led intuitively by their desires and their needs in certain direction. Their actions are governed by environmental stresses from without and physical pressures from within.

It is in this unique conceptual quality of man that we can conceive of what his higher purpose in life should be. The latter can only be one which does not result from the pressures of desire or of immediate exigencies. It must emanate from his own urge to worship God.

Man's true purpose in life can only be one which reflects the higher side of his personality; one which displays him as the superior being he is.

If one pauses at this stage to take note of what the Qur'an has to say, one will find that it gives us clear

guidance in the matter. Man's purpose in life has been explained in the Qur'an in the following words:

I created mankind and the Jinn that they might worship me. I demand no livelihood of them, nor do I ask that they should feed me. God alone is the Munificent Giver, the Mighty One, the Invincible. (51:56-58)

These verses specify man's purpose in life as worship. This is a purpose which elicits from man his uniqueness in its ultimate form. It raises man to a much higher plane than that of animals. Not a trace of animalism contributes to the achievement of such a goal. God does not demand of you a livelihood, the verse states; rather He himself is responsible of your livelihood. This means that worship of God is a purpose which is motivated neither by inward desires nor outward influences. Rather it comes into being through thought alone. Only when a person goes beyond his self and his environment can he understand that there is a higher purpose on which he should focus his life.

The motive force towards the fulfillment of this purpose is not the urge to satisfy one's needs or those of others. The worshipper seeks neither to gratify his own desires nor those of the Being he worships. It is a purpose which sets before man a goal far above all these things – a goal which does not follow internal needs or external pressures, but results purely from conceptual thought.

When a person works, makes money, builds a house, makes an effort to improve his standard of living, he appears to be engaged in efforts towards some worthy end. But a life of this nature cannot be called a purposeful life, for these activities do not demonstrate man's unique status. It might seem as if they are the result of deliberation, but if one looks at the matter in depth, one will see that in actual fact the motive force behind these actions is the same urge that motivates an animal in various ways, its concern for its own survival. It is the driving force of one's desires; the pressure of one's needs and the wish to fulfill the demands of one's self that underlie such a life. These are the considerations which in fact, guide a person in his search for his livelihood.

When man grows up, he realizes that there are certain material necessities without which he cannot live. He requires food, clothes, a place to live; he requires a reliable source of income to sustain him throughout his life. He is forced by these considerations to obtain these things. Then he sees that those who have an abundance of these material things enjoy respect and apparently possess every form of happiness and luxury in this world. Thus he is driven on to do more than just seek a livelihood; he desires to earn to a degree greatly in excess of his actual requirements.

In bustling markets, grandiose offices, and opulent buildings, he is not really guided by deliberate thought. Rather, he is being guided by inflated ideas of his own needs, desires, longings and ambitions to achieve fame and high status in this world. For this reason these activities cannot be considered as being directed towards the purpose which sets man apart from the animal and lends him a higher distinction.

Man's greater dignity can be based only on a purpose which emanates from inner desires and pressures of environment. Man's true purpose in life can only be to seek the pleasure of God. When man seeks the pleasure of his Lord, his human qualities find full manifestation. This is a purpose loftier than the one

towards which an animal directs its energies. It distinguishes man from animals. It is the ultimate station of human dignity.

To determine the purpose of life is, in short, the effort to make life meaningful. It must surely, therefore, be one which is in accordance with man's unique status; it must be one which leads man on the path to success and progress in terms of his true nature.

Wise Men

In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, there are signs for men of sense; those that remember Allah when standing, sitting, and lying down, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth (saying): 'Lord, You have not created these in vain. Glory be to You! Save us from the torment of the Fire. Lord, those whom You will cast into Hell shall be put to eternal shame: none will help the evil-doers (3: 190-192).

The Universe in its entire existence is a silent proclamation, but it is only when man unstops his ears that he starts to hear it. He finds it impossible that in a universe where the stars and planets survive for millions of years, man with all his desires and ambitions is obliterated from the face of the earth in a very short period of time. In a world where there is the beauty of the trees, the delicacy of the flowers, where air, water, sun and innumerable such meaningful things have been provided, should there be no other fate for man but an endless chain of woe and agony?

Then he finds it impossible too that in a world of boundless opportunities, where tiny seeds sown in the earth have the potential to grow into a whole forest of lush green vegetation, man should reap no fruit after leading a life of piety and virtue. In a world where a bright day follows each dark night, centuries go by but justice does not make its appearance. And where earthquakes and tempests, reined in by nature, slumber in the lap of the earth, man continues to oppress people without anything ever staying his hands.

Those who go deeply into the matter find it inconceivable that a meaningful universe should culminate in a meaningless end. Therefore they believe in the Caller of Truth with the conviction that his message, in the language of words, is a silent endorsement of the same truth as is being broadcast every moment in the entire Universe

In the Hereafter

'Jinn and men! Did there not come to you apostles of your own who proclaimed to you My revelations and warned you of this day?' They will reply: 'We bear witness against our own souls.' Indeed, the life of this world beguiled them. They will testify to their own faithlessness. Your Lord will not destroy a nation without just cause and due warning (6:131-132).

By drawing man towards him through attractive temptations, Satan actually wants to prove the truth of the challenge which he gave to God at the beginning of man's creation, that he would overpower all but a few of his descendants (17:61). Those who are lured by Satan have clear material interests before them. There are some who engage themselves in the pursuit of magic in the name of genies, while others establish their superiority over the gullible public by linking their poetry or soothsaying to a genie patron, that is, they claim to have been inspired by a genie. In the Hereafter, it will be evident that those who went astray, or those who led people astray, did not do so due to any misunderstanding. Indeed, they knowingly ignored the truth; it was not a case of their remaining unaware of it but of their being unable to rise above worldly temptations. They could not bring themselves to sacrifice their temporary gains. It is patent that the guidance sent to them by God through His chosen servants was so clear that no one could have remained ignorant of the truth. But their love of this world was responsible for drawing a veil over their eyes. They did not follow the path of guidance, despite the fact that they were fully informed of it.

In the Hereafter all those artificial props which made people unmindful of reality will vanish. Then they will see clearly how it happened that truth came before them, but they rejected it outright, resorting to falsehoods as excuses. It will become obvious to them how their error was shown to them as plain as daylight, and how they managed to find beautiful words to refute the truth, thinking that they would succeed in proving that their stand was the right one.

God forgives lapses, but He will not forgive insolence.

Man's Trial

We created you and gave you form. Then We said to the angels: 'Prostrate yourselves before Adam.' They all prostrated themselves except Satan, who did not.

'Why did you not prostrate yourself when I commanded you?' Allah asked.

'I am nobler than Adam,' he replied. 'You created me of fire but You created him of clay.'

He said: 'Begone from here! This is no place for your contemptuous pride. Away with you! Henceforth you shall be humble.'

Satan replied: 'Reprieve me till the Day of Resurrection.'

'You are reprieved,' said He.

'Because You have led me into sin,' said Satan, 'I will waylay Your servants as they walk on Your straight path, and spring upon them from the front and from the rear, from their right and from their left. Then You shall find the greater part of them ungrateful.'

'Begone!' said Allah. 'A despicable outcast you shall henceforth be. With those that follow you I shall fill the pit of Hell' (7: 11-18).

In this world of trial it repeatedly happens that one person rises above another, attaining to a greater share in wealth and honour; sometimes it happens that giving one's lawful dues amounts to belittling oneself; sometimes God selects an individual to proclaim a truth on behalf of God, whereupon he appears to be superior to those who failed to find the truth. On such occasions Satan arouses jealousy and haughtiness within the human breast. The feeling of 'I am better than he is' does not allow one man to give recognition to another. In the eyes of God, one who falls a prey to jealousy and arrogance on such occasions follows the path of Satan. One who crushes such negative feelings produced by Satan finds the straight path which will lead him directly to heaven.

Robe of Piety

Children of Adam! We have given you clothing with which to cover your nakedness, and garments pleasing to the eye, but the finest of all of these is the robe of piety.

That is one of Allah's revelations. Perchance they will take heed.

Children of Adam! Let the devil not deceive you, as he deceived your parents out of Paradise. He stripped them of their garments to reveal to them their nakedness. He and his companions see you whence you cannot see them. We have made the devils supporters of unbelievers (7:26-27).

Man needs to be clothed, but not just externally. He needs inner raiment too – that of piety – fear of God, acceptance of truth, setting the same standard for oneself as for others, regarding oneself as God's servant, remaining modest and humble, concentrating on the thoughts of the Hereafter instead of being astray in the world. When a person adopts all these values, it is like a splendid dressing of his inner existence, and when he adopts an attitude opposite to this, he divests his inner existence of its entire moral apparel.

Satan tempts man. He makes people believe the 'forbidden tree' to be the source of all good. He comes to man from such seemingly innocent paths that man has no inkling that the way is paved with sinfulness. Satan attacks man at his weakest points. Sometimes an idea which has nothing to do with truth is described in beautiful words. Sometimes a partial truth is brought before people as total truth, sometimes trivial things are made out to be of vital importance. Sometimes a useless activity is depicted as the secret of all progress. Sometimes a destructive act is presented as a constructive act.

Satan succeeds with those people who do not ponder over the signs of God; who are not willing to understand what is rational in the language of argument; who prefer their personal prejudices to the demands of truth; who cannot see such truth as makes no concession to their personal gains and considerations.

Avoidance

Avoidance of friction is one of the most important principles of Islam. Such avoidance means refraining from retaliation on occasions of complaint and dissension.

By temperament, all men and women differ from one another in many ways. Everyone has experienced the disagreeable situations, arising from such differences. In social life, be it inside or outside the home, it is but natural that unpleasantness should occur from time to time. This is unavoidable.

Now whenever any negative situation arises one way of dealing with it is a head-on clash, i.e. an attempt to solve the problem by direct confrontation. Such attempts are abortive as they only aggravate the problem. In no way will they improve matters.

Islam tells us that on such occasions we should adopt the policy of avoidance. That is, instead of behaving violently and fighting, we should opt for the course of tolerance and forbearance; instead of combating violence with violence, we should adopt the policy of avoidance; remaining united in spite of differences.

According to Islam, it is not only a point of social behaviour but an act meriting great reward. Living with people, and observing their principles are acts which would deserve a reward in normal circumstances, but when one continues to be well-behaved in spite of differences and grudges, by curbing negative sentiments, then the reward is increased manifold. Those who sedulously avoid friction will be counted by God among the possessors of a superior character.

For the human character to retain its superiority there must be staunch and unceasing adherence to the principle of avoidance.

Good Character

Good character is the sum of personal virtues which guarantees correct and agreeable behaviour in daily social interaction. A person of good character will invariably conform in his behaviour to a strict code of ethics.

What should be the underlying principle of this code of ethics? According to a hadith it is simply this – you should like for others what you like for yourself, that is, you should treat others just as you want to be treated by others.

Everyone likes to be addressed with good manners and pleasing words. So everyone should speak gently to others. Everyone wants his existence to be problem-free, so he should avoid creating problems for others.

Everyone wants others to deal with him in a sympathetic and cooperative manner. So what everyone ought to do while dealing with others is to give them his full sympathy and cooperation.

This standard of ethics is very simple and natural. It is so simple that anyone may easily learn it, be he literate or illiterate, able bodied or disabled, and regardless of his likes and dislikes. This hadith has given such a criterion for human ethics that no one can find difficult to understand. In this way Islam has set forth, in the light of everyone's personal experience, what behaviour may be indulged in and what behaviour has to be refrained from.

According to another hadith, the best of us is one who is best in moral character. Accordingly, becoming a good human being has nothing ambiguous about it. Its simple formula is that of avoidance of double standards. One who lives his life by this formula is indubitably a person of the highest moral character.

Faith and Reason

In its issue no. 134 (1992), the journal, Faith and Reason, published from Manchester College, Oxford (England), brought out an article titled, 'The Relationship between Faith and Reason', by Dr Paul Badham. Paul Badham is a Professor of Theology and Religious Studies at St. David's College, Lampeter, in the University of Wales. His paper in this issue had been presented at a Conference of the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Science in Moscow in November 1991.

Professor Badham's paper can indeed be called thought-provoking, and as such, is worth reading, but he has made certain points with which I do not agree. He states that philosophical certainty should not be confused with religious certitude. He writes: As a philosopher of religion I feel compelled to acknowledge that faith could never be placed on the same level of certainty as scientific knowledge' (p. 6). On the contrary, I feel that faith and belief can be placed on the same level of certainty as scientific theory. At least, in the twentieth century there is no real difference between the two.

Knowledge is composed of two kinds of things; Bertrand Russell puts it, knowledge of things and knowledge of truths. This dichotomy exists in religion as well as in science. For instance, to the scientist who regards biological evolution as a scientific fact, there are two aspects to be considered. One is related to the organic part of species and the other relates to the law of evolution which is inherently and covertly operative in the continuing process of change among the species.

When an evolutionist studies the outward physical appearance of species, he may be said to be studying 'things'. Whereas when he studies the law of evolution, he deals with that aspect of the subject which is termed the study or knowledge of truths.'

Every evolutionist knows that a basic difference between the two aspects. As far as the study of things or the phenomena of evolution is concerned, direct evidence is available. For instance, because the study of fossils found in various layers of the earth's crust is possible at the level of observation, working hypothesis may be based thereon.

On the contrary, as far as facts about the law of evolution are concerned, due to the impossibility of objective observation, direct argument is not possible. For instance, the concept of sudden mutations in the organs is entirely based on assumptions rather than on direct observation. In the case of mutations, external changes are observable, but the cause, that is, the law of nature, is totally unobservable. That is why all the evolutionists make use of indirect argument, which in logic is known as inferential argument.

The concept of mutation forms the basis of the theory of evolution. However there are two aspects to the matter. One comes under observation, but the second part is totally unobservable. It is only by making use of the principle of inference that this second part of evolution may be included in the theory of evolution.

It is commonplace that all the offspring of men or animals are not uniform. Differences of one kind or another are to be found. In modern times this biological phenomenon has been scientifically studied. These studies have revealed spontaneous changes suddenly produced in the foetus in the mother's womb. It is these changes that are responsible for the differences between children of the same parents.

This differences between off springs are observable. But the philosophy of evolution subsequently formed on the basis of this observation is totally unobservable and is based only on inferential argument. That is to say that the 'things' of evolution are observable, while the 'truths' inferred from observation are unobservable.

Now, what the evolutionist does is put a goat at one end and a giraffe at the other. Then taking some middle specimens of the fossils he forms a theory that the neck of one of the offspring of the earlier generation of the goat was somewhat taller. Then when this particular offspring with the taller neck gave birth, this tallness for generations over millions of years ultimately converted the initial goat with a taller neck into a species like the giraffe in its advanced stage. Charles Darwin writes of this change in his book *The Origin of Species*: "....it seems to me almost certain that an ordinary hoofed quadruped might be converted into a giraffe" (p. 169).

In this case, the existence of differences between the various offspring of a goat is itself a known fact. But the accumulation of this difference, generation after generation, over millions of years resulting in a new species known as 'giraffe' is wholly unobservable and unrepeatable. This conclusion has been inferred from observation only; the whole process of mutation developing into a new species has never come under our direct observation.

Exactly the same is true of the subject of religion. One aspect of the study of religion is the study of its history, its personalities, its injunctions, its rites and its rituals. The above division (knowledge of things and knowledge of truths) amounts to a study of the 'things' of religion. In respect of religion, objective information is likewise available. As such, the study of religion too can be done on the basis of direct observations exactly as is done in the study of biological evolution.

The second aspect of the study of religion is what is termed, in general, beliefs pertaining to the unseen world. These are the beliefs that are beyond our known sensory world. That is, the existence of God and the angels, revelation, hell and heaven, etc. In this other aspect of religion direct observations do not exist. The study of religion must, therefore, be done in the light of that logical principle called inference on the basis of observation, that is, the same logical principle which the evolutionists employ in the second aspect of their theory.

Looked at in the" light of this principle, both religion and science are at a par. Both have two equally different parts. One part is based on such scientific certainty as permits direct argument. The other part is based on scientific inference, to prove which only the principle of indirect argument may be used. Keeping this logical division before us, we can find no actual difference between the two.

The unnecessary apologia for religious uncertainty made by Professor Badham is occasioned by his inability to consider this difference, and his confusing one area of study with another. Making the error of false analogy, he is comparing the first part of science to the second part of religion and looking at the second part of religion in the light of the first part of science. This meaningless comparison is responsible for the ill-considered conclusions he has arrived at in his article.

Had the worthy Professor compared the first part of science to the first part of religion and the second part of science to the second part of the religion, his inferiority complex (as a man of religion) would have ceased to exist. He would have felt that, purely as a matter of principle the wrong parallels had been drawn. The argument used in the first part of science is equally applicable to the first part of religion. Similarly the argument applied to the second part of science is equally applicable to the second part of religion.

This is a truth which has been acknowledged even by a staunch and leading atheist like Bertrand Russell. At the beginning of his book *Why I am not a Christian* he has set forth what he considers a valid argument. He points out that in his view all the great religions of the world – Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Communism – were all untrue and harmful, and that it is not possible to prove their validity from the logical point of view. Those who have opted for one religion or the other have done so, according to Russell, under the influence of their traditions and environment, rather than on the strength of argument.

However, Bertrand Russell has admitted this fact when he says, “there is one of these arguments which is not purely logical. I mean the argument from design. This argument, however, was destroyed by Darwin.”

He intends here to say that the existence of God is proved by the argument that in this world where there is design, there should be a designer. He admits that this method of argument in its nature is the same as that used to prove scientific concepts. However, even after this admission, he rejects this argument by saying that it has been destroyed by Darwinism.

This is, however, a wholly baseless point, as Darwin’s theory is related to the Creator’s process of creation rather than to the existence of Creator. To put it briefly, Darwinism states that the various species found in the world were not separate creations but had changed from one species into separate species over a prolonged period of evolution by a process of natural selection.

It is obvious that this theory is not related to the existence or non-existence of God. It deals with the process of Creation instead of the Creator. That is to say, if it was hitherto believed that God created each species separately, now after accepting the theory of evolution it has to be believed that God originally created an initial species which was invested with the capability of multiplying into numerous species. And then He set in motion a natural process in the universe favourable to such multiplication. In this way, over a long period of time this primary species fulfilled its potential by changing into innumerable species. To put it another way, the theory of evolution is not a study of the existence of

God, but simply of how God has displayed in the universe his power of creation. That is why Darwin himself has concluded his famous book *The Origin of Species* with these words:

There is grandeur in this view of life, that having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved (p. 408).

It is true that the new facts regarding the universe discovered in the twentieth century have revolutionised the world of logic. Now the difference between religious argument and scientific argument which had been erroneously conceived prior to the twentieth century has been eliminated. Now in respect of argument, the case of science too has reached exactly the same point as religion.

Newton (1642-1727) made a special study of the solar system, discovering laws governing the revolution of planets around the sun. His study was, however, confined to astronomical bodies, which can be called the macro-world. It is possible in the macro world to weigh and measure things. As a result of the immediate impact of these discoveries, many began to think along the lines that reality was observable, and that proper and valid argument was one based on observation. It was under the influence of this concept that the philosophy generally known as positivism came into being.

However the discoveries made in the first quarter of the century shook the very foundation of their preliminary theories. These later discoveries revealed that beyond this world of appearance, a whole world was hidden, which does not come under observation. It is only indirectly possible to understand this hidden world and present arguments in its favour. That is, by observing the effects of something, we arrive at an understanding of its existence.

This discovery altered the whole picture. When the access of human knowledge was limited to the macro-cosmic world, man was a prey to this misapprehension. But when human knowledge penetrated the micro-world, the academic situation changed on its own.

Now it was revealed that the field of direct argument was extremely limited. New facts which came to the knowledge of man were so abstruse that indirect or inferential argument alone was applicable. For instance, The German scientist, Wilhelm Konrad Roentgen found in 1895 during an experiment that on a glass before him some effects were observable, despite the fact that there was no known link between his experiment and the glass. He concluded that there was an invisible radiation which was traveling at the speed of 186,000 miles per second. Due to the unknown nature of this radiation, Reontgen named it X-rays (Encyclopedia Britannica, 19/1058).

The twentieth century has seen the discoveries of a number of things like X-rays, which do not come under direct human observation. However due to their effects having come to the knowledge of man, it was not possible to deny their existence. As a result of modern research, not only were different departments of science revolutionized but the science of logic too saw basic changes.

Now inferential reasoning was also accepted as a valid method of reasoning, for, without these discoveries like X-rays, the scientific structure of the atom, the existence of Dark Matter, etc., could not have been explained.

After the extension of this method of reasoning in modern times, argument on religious faith has become as valid as reasoning on scientific concepts. Exactly the same inferential logic which was employed to prove the newly discovered concepts of science was applicable to religious faiths to prove their veracity. Now differences in the criterion of logic have vanished.

Answer to a Question

At the end of his article Professor Badham writes:

And I have to acknowledge that the existence of so much evil and suffering in the world counts against any vision of an all-powerful and loving God (p. 7).

Here I have to say that evil is a relative word. An evil is an evil so long as it cannot be explained. A doctor performs surgery on the patient's body, a judge sentences a criminal to be hanged. All this appears to be injustice, cruelty. But we do not call it so, simply because we have a proper explanation to give for the acts of the judge and the doctor. The same is true of the evil pointed out by the article writer.

The first point is that the evil existing in human society is not spread over the entire universe. Leaving aside the limited human world, the vast universe is perfect, par excellence. It is entirely free of any defect or evil.

Now the question arises as to why there is evil in the human world. To arrive at an understanding of this we shall have to understand the creation plan of the Creator. The creation plan of God provides the only criterion by which to judge the nature of the matter.

The creation plan of God as revealed to His Prophets is that this world is a testing ground, where man's virtue is placed on trial. It is in accordance with the records of this trial period that man's eternal fate will be decreed. It is for the purpose of this test that he has been granted freedom. In the absence of freedom, the question of life being a test would not arise.

The present evil is, in fact, a concomitant of this freedom. God desires to select those individuals who, in spite of being granted freedom, lead a disciplined and principled life. For individuals to prove their worth an atmosphere of freedom must be provided. Undoubtedly, due to such an atmosphere, some people will surely misuse this freedom and perpetrate injustice. But this is the inevitable price to be paid for such a creation plan to be brought to completion. No better creation plan can be envisaged for this world.

The present world appears meaningless when seen independently, that is, without joining the Hereafter with it. But when we take this world and the Hereafter together, the entire matter takes a new turn. Now this world becomes extremely meaningful and extremely valuable.

On the basis of falsehood

Pravda, (literal meaning: truth) a Russian daily newspaper with a circulation of eleven million was brought out by the Communist Party in 1912, a few years before the Russian revolution. With editors of the calibre of Stalin and Lenin on its editorial board in the initial stages, it came to be regarded as one of the most important newspapers of the former Soviet Union. Its correspondents numbered more than forty thousand.

Besides being in possession of large properties, *Pravda* was granted extraordinary aid by the government. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, however, all aid stopped and its properties were confiscated in the same year by the newly formed government.

Consequently, the newspaper suffered from insurmountable monetary problems, and its publication ultimately ceased on March 14, 1992.

Pravda's entire importance was associated with the socialist regime. The communists had carved out an economic and political hell in the name of the Soviet Union, but through *Pravda* they contrived to present this system to the world as a kind of Paradise. Herein lay the value of the *Pravda* as it served their purpose only too well. When the spell of the socialistic 'heaven' was broken and the truth laid bare, *Pravda* was left with no chance to present falsehood as truth. It was this reality which dealt it the final death blow.

Under the heading 'Truth is Dead' (TOI, March 19, 1992) a commentator writes:

No wonder it now finds it difficult to face up to the truth: that it has no place in post-Communist Russia.'

A somewhat similar happening will occur in the Hereafter. They will then learn, all of a sudden, that not to speak of eleven million, not even eleven people will be subscribers to their so-called truth.

Fasting and Qur'an

The Qur'an makes special mention of its revelation in the month of Ramadan, while making it obligatory upon the followers. This indicates that there is a close link between Ramadan and the Qur'an. In the words of the Qur'an:

The month of Ramadhan is the month in which the Quran was revealed, a book of guidance with proofs of guidance distinguishing right from wrong. Therefore, whoever of you is well in that month, let him fast. (2:185)

The revelation of Qur'an started in 610 A.D., in the month of Ramadan according to the lunar calendar. The first revelation was made to the Prophet when he was in the cave of Hira, and it continued for the next 23 years, finally reaching completion in Medina.

The guidance given in the Qur'an is the best blessing to the mankind from God, because it shows man the path to ultimate success. It tells man how to conduct himself so that in his eternal life he can gain entry into paradise. Paradise is the goal of man. Fasting is the path to it.

The month of Ramadan is the annual reminder of this blessing. The celebration of the revelation of the Qur'an is not observed in the usual way but by abstinence and being thankful to the Almighty. Fasting in this month is acknowledgment of the divine blessings. It is like saying, 'O Lord I have heard and I accept it.'

Also this is a month during which the Qur'an should be read and understood. The Qur'an is specially recited in this month. In the night the Qur'an is also recited during Tarawih. This month has been made special so that the blessings of God may be counted even more.

When the Qur'an is read during the month of its revelation, it reminds us of the time when the divine light from heaven fell upon the earth. Man remembers this and cries out, 'O Lord, fill my heart with your divine light!' He cries out, 'Make me among those who are near you!' When he reads about Hell and Paradise, his inner self cries out, 'O Lord, save me from Hell, and let me enter Paradise.'

In this way the Qur'an becomes a guiding force in man's life. He earns his livelihood according to its dictates. He bathes in the ocean of its life to cleanse his soul.

The Qur'an is a reward to His servants from God. And fasting is acknowledgment of the reward. Through fasting man makes himself worthy of being thankful to God. He obeys the command of God and thus revels in the supremacy of God. Having gone through a month's fasting, he creates an ability in himself to lead a life of piety as ordained in the Qur'an.

Fasting is a special deed. It makes a man kind-hearted, and enables him to awaken his finer feelings. He is then able to feel and experience what God desires of a man in this world.

Fasting, a form of training to create the capacity in a man to become the most devoted worshipper, makes him most grateful to God and creates a fear of Him which makes him shiver. The very hardship of fasting carries a man from the material world to the plain of spirituality.

Islam: Creator of the Modern Age A Review

Having read *God Arises*, a powerful treatise on the proofs of God in the Universe, by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, I was anxious if somewhat nervous to read his new work, *Islam: Creator of the Modern Age*. While I looked forward to delving into another of this writer's good books, my fear was that his latest work might not live up to my expectations. I realized my fears were baseless by the time I had reached the second or third page. Maulana's scholarship again proves fascinating and his writing style infinitely readable.

The basic premise of *Islam: Creator of the Modern Age* is that without the advent of Prophet Muhammad and the final establishment of monotheism on the earth, none of what we take for granted in the modern world could possibly have developed. Quoting sources as diverse as Bertrand Russell and *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the Maulana takes us on a trip through history and around the world. He deftly presents his facts until we reach the conclusion that without monotheism the concepts of experimentation and scientific enquiry, not to mention modern industrialization, would not exist.

Take for example the ancient Greeks. Their society was steeped in polytheism and superstition. Many natural phenomena were believed to be endowed with godly powers. It was impossible to scientifically investigate something so revered. Consequently, people worshipped nature rather than explore it.

We tend to think of ancient Greece as a free thinking democracy. In fact this is not entirely true; only the upper classes were allowed any latitude; free speech and free thought were actively discouraged to protect the hold of the man-made religions over the populace. The Greek rulers like many others throughout time have used the polytheistic beliefs of their subjects to shore up their own power, claiming divine ancestors and the "divine right of kings".

The Maulana moves forward to modern day India where he points out that the attribution of divinity to the non-divine or the concept of shirk has had far reaching consequences. Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, former director of the Indian Agricultural Institute, New Delhi, blames "protein hunger" or lack of animal protein in the Hindu diet for the prospect of intellectual dwarfing of the nation's youngsters. Because people worship the cow, a food source, their children suffer from malnutrition while not necessarily going hungry.

In the chapter on Muslim contributions to science, the Maulana discusses areas as diverse as the solar system and historiography. In every case, the Islamic concept of the oneness of God, while everything else existing in the world have enabled the Muslims to investigate and harness the earth's resources for the betterment of mankind as a whole. Far from worshipping things found in the heavens and on earth, Muslims have been able to look into the unexplained and take advantage of the things the Creator has given us to improve our lives.

In this book, the Maulana has once more made science and philosophy infinitely understandable. He draws on a wealth of sources to make his arguments. He presents Islam as it should be, as a religion of logic and reason, dazzling in its perfection and simplicity. One comes away with the feeling that Islam might just be the best kept secret in the western world.

(Anis Ahmad, Australia)

The Making of the Indian Nation

Almost half a century has passed since India gained its independence, but it has yet to join the ranks of the developed countries. That is a dream still to be realized. And this is in spite of India being a large country with all kinds of potential.

One reason for this tragic failure is the Indian people's lack of national character. The majority of the deficiencies we find in the country today can be traced to this basic shortcoming. Bereft of this sterling quality, we have fallen short in taking the country towards progress and prosperity.

What is national character? It is, to put it simply, the capacity and the will to hold the interests of the nation supreme in every sphere. Whenever there is a clash between individual and national interests, it means individual concerns being subordinated to the greater good of the nation. Whenever a nation has made any progress, it has been due to this spirit of nationalism. Without such a spirit, no nation can advance itself either internally or externally.

Now the question arises as to why, during this period of just under 50 years, many countries have succeeded in fostering a strong, national spirit in their people, and now stand alongside developed countries like Singapore, Korea, Malaysia and Japan, etc., while India still lags far behind. There is one basic reason for this: attempting to achieve the possible by means which are impossible. Producing national spirit or character in India is certainly possible. It is just that we have set off on the wrong track, and once on it, it is difficult to retrace our steps and get on to the right track.

After independence, an "Indian nation" had come into existence in the political and geographical sense. But, at the psychological level, the level of feelings and emotions, our position was still that of a nation in the making. For the desired national reconstruction to take place, our leaders proposed a recipe based on the concept of a common heritage with three main parts: religious unity, historical unity and cultural unity.

Religious unity implied that all religions were essentially one. It was believed that if this concept could take root in people's minds, it would produce a sense of unity all over the country. Historically, of course, this assumption was wrong; there is a long, sorry record of co-religionists fighting fiercely among themselves. For instance, in the war of Mahabharat, the warriors on both sides were of the Hindu religion. In the first and second world wars, the combatants on both sides were of the Christian faith. Babar had armed confrontations with his own co-religionists, finally inflicting decisive defeats on them. And so on.

The attempt to bring about religious unity in India has had active support right from the time of Akbar, who bolstered it politically, to present times, when intellectuals such as Dr. Bhagwan Das (a contemporary of Jawaharlal Nehru) attempted to solve the problem with their encyclopedic knowledge of the subject. But this goal could never be achieved for the simple reason that the assumption that all religions are one and the same is incorrect; and no durable structure can be erected on false premises. It

is an undeniable fact that there are differences between the various religions. Given these differences, it is difficult, if not impossible, for the adherents of one religion to reach the point of agreeing that the tenets and practices of another religion have an equal value. However, if the adherents of different religions see each other, first and foremost, as human beings, as members of the same human race, they can certainly accord each other equal respect. Through mutual respect, many social benefits can accrue which would be rendered impossible in the wake of futile attempts at mutual recognition of religious beliefs.

Let us now look at how history comes into the picture. It is assumed that even where there are people of different persuasions, a common sense of history will produce a common sense of nationhood. And where this is seen to be lacking, it is advocated that such a sense be inculcated. But this would again be an attempt to achieve the possible by means which are impossible. All countries, be they as small as Singapore, or as large as the U.S.A., are inhabited by varied races and ethnic groups. In this respect there are several different strands to their historical heritage. But in none of these countries has there been any attempt to bulldoze people into sharing a common sense of history. Instead, there has been an acknowledgment of each citizen's individuality. That is why, albeit imbued with different historical feelings, the various groups lead harmonious lives and are engaged in the common cause of nation building.

The third point concerns the acceptance of a common culture. This is wholly impracticable. Culture inevitably evolves a long historical process. It can never be imposed upon a group through any external agency.

After the Second World War, a movement was launched in the USA to produce a common culture throughout the country by a process of Americanization. A similar movement was launched in Canada, but in both countries, these initiatives were a failure. Ultimately both had to abandon the idea of uniculture and come to terms with multi-culture. In India, as elsewhere, this is the only possible solution.

The truth is that the only practicable basis of nationhood is patriotism. That is, the feeling on the part of the individual or group that their future is linked with one country and one country alone; that individual success is inextricably linked with the progress of the country; that the interests of the country must be held supreme, and that if sacrifices are required for the safety or advancement of the country, they must be willingly made. Without such feelings of patriotism as are here defined, no country can be successfully run.

If the tasks of constructing the nation is to be successfully accomplished, we must rid ourselves of our obsession with such impracticable concepts as unity of religion, history and culture, and should forge ahead on the same lines as Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, Britain, France and America.

Our prime target should be the generation of patriotism in our country. And it should be a patriotism which is based not on the past, but on the present and the future. The only way to do this is to instill in each and every individual a deep-rooted love of his country. Instead of wasting time on the impossible, we should concentrate on building the kind of national character to be found in developed countries. If we set ourselves sedulously to such tasks as these, we should, within the span of one generation, be able to create for ourselves the ideal nation.

A Purposeful Creation

Why was this world made? Why was man born into this world? Why, after a certain period of time, does he pass away? What will happen after death? These are the most important questions concerning the origins and fate of mankind, and they should never be far from people's minds. Finding the correct answers to these questions has always been one of man's most important quests.

Pondered over for thousands of years, these questions have been variously answered by different people. However, these answers can be placed in two broad categories: one, which holds the great array of wonders in this world to be purposeless, and the other, which asserts that man was created with a purpose and that he has a definite goal.

While the first view tends to be subscribed to by poets, philosophers and secular scholars, the second view is firmly upheld by that very special class of beings called prophets, or messengers of God. The most authentic testament to the second view has been provided by the Prophet Muhammad.

Many arguments can be put forward in support of the answers in both of these categories. It is very obvious, however, that the notion of purposelessness is not in keeping with the structure of life and universe. The idea, on the other hand, of purposeful creation, falls exactly into place, for the simple reason that it contains no inherent contradictions.

The world into which man is born is fraught with significance. There is nothing which is of a meaningless or random nature. It is quite unthinkable that man, with his meaningful life, born into a meaningful universe, should find no purpose in creation. Where there is meaningfulness, there will, of necessity, be purposefulness. This aspect of the universe is a clear verification of the Prophet's answer.

Man's Future

Gyani Zail Singh was born in Rajkot in Punjab in 1916. His father, a poor carpenter, could not give him a proper education. It was after joining politics that he acquired fame. Rising from the position of minister and chief minister, he ultimately came to hold the highest post in India—that of President. Having begun his life in a humble dwelling, he nevertheless managed to reach New Delhi's Rashtrapati Bhawan.

On November 29, 1994, he was badly injured in a car accident. He was immediately admitted to the Nehru Hospital at Chandigarh but he never recovered. Having begun his life with none of the trappings of greatness, he returned to that same state with his death on December 25, 1994.

A cartoon was published in the same newspaper which brought the news of Gyani Zail Singh's demise. A fat man was shown perched on a chair, crippled with old age. These were his words:

I have worked hard. And finally amassed all the money I'll never need. But I'm too old to enjoy it. .

The same is true of all men. After great expenditure of physical and mental resources, man is able to achieve material progress. But when he reaches the height of success, the painful realization dawns upon him that this material progress is of no use to him. In spite of possessing everything, he is as helpless as the next person. How strange is man's destiny. He is in possession only of his past and present: he has no power over his future.

Here in this world wealth is as meaningless as poverty. Here, a royal life is as insignificant as a life in a lowly cottage.